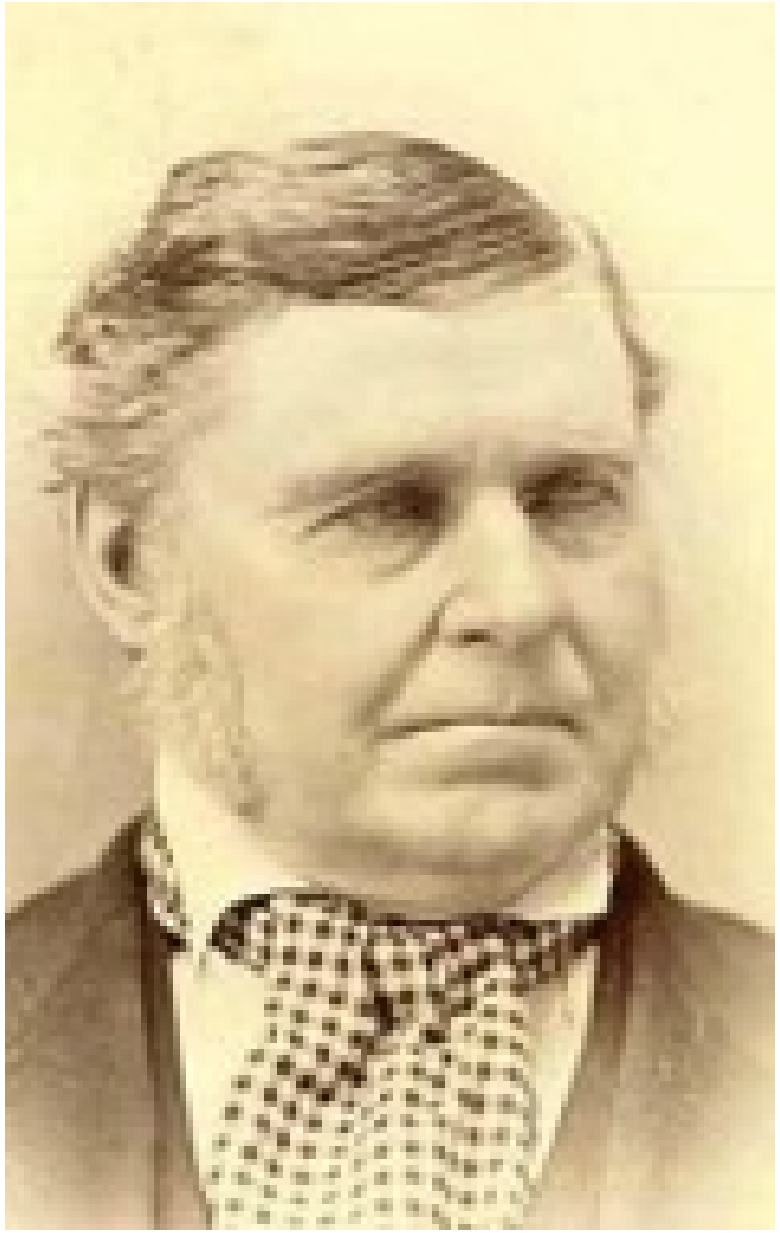
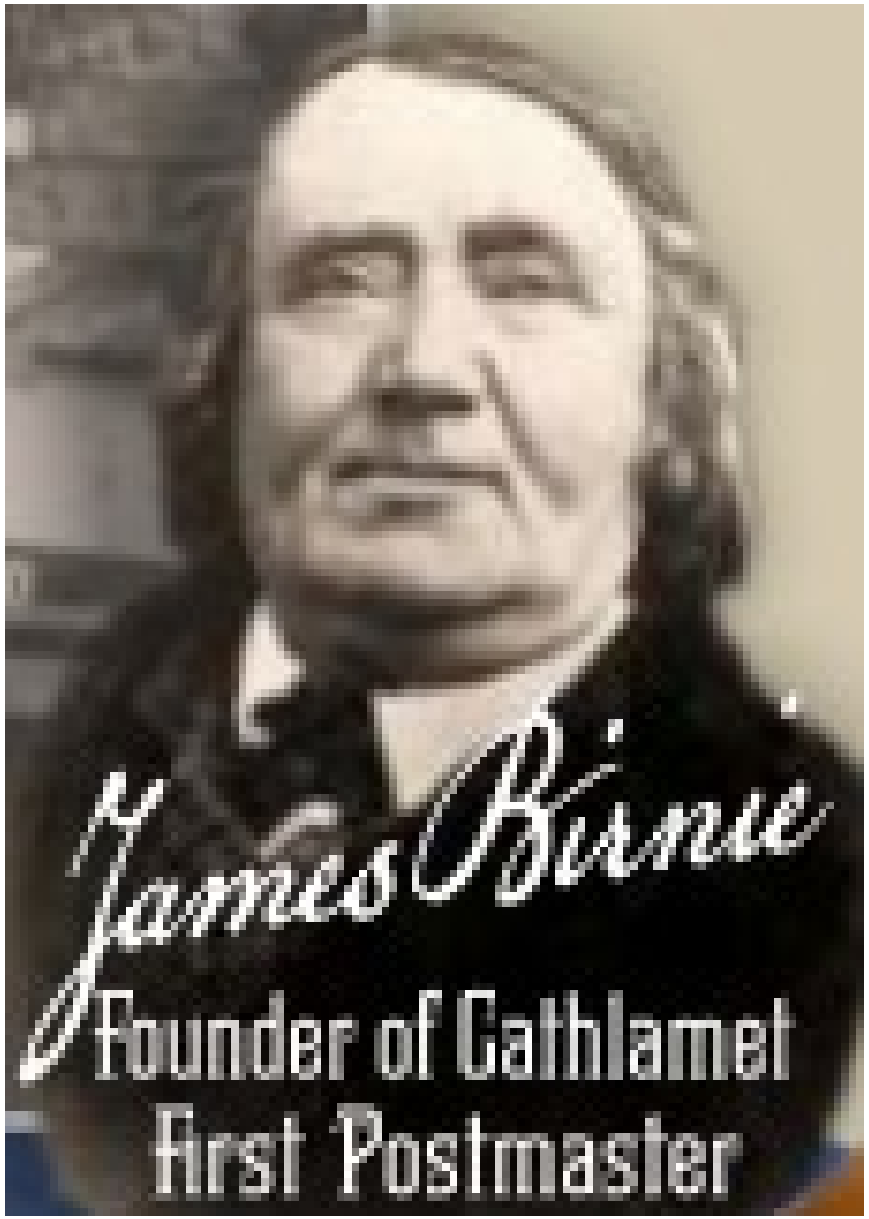
Catching the Last Ferry

The Cathlamet-Puget Island-Westport Connection

by Jim Aalberg

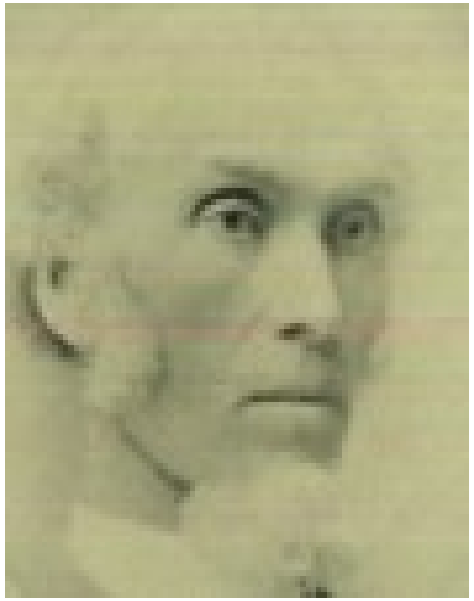
PROLOGUE



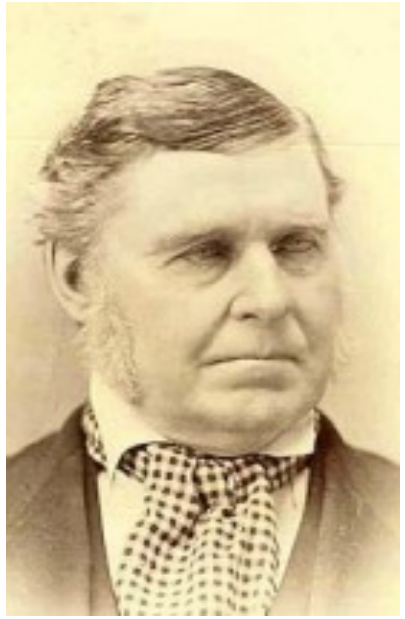

James Birnie
Founder of Cathlamet
First Postmaster

Skervin

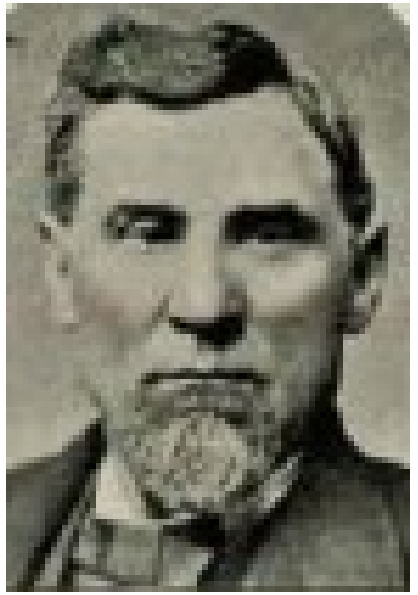
West



Scott



West



McGuire

- McLean
- McFarland
- McIntosh
- McMath
- McKinnon
- McGilluray
- McGregor
- McQuarrie

- McDonald
- Skervin
- Scott
- West
- Ross
- Muir
- McGuire

1811-
1894

Circa 1875. George West was "Captain" John West's brother and he was family patriarch of the Cathlamet, Wa. Wests.

Captain David Ingram and Christina West

Married Cathlamet 1892

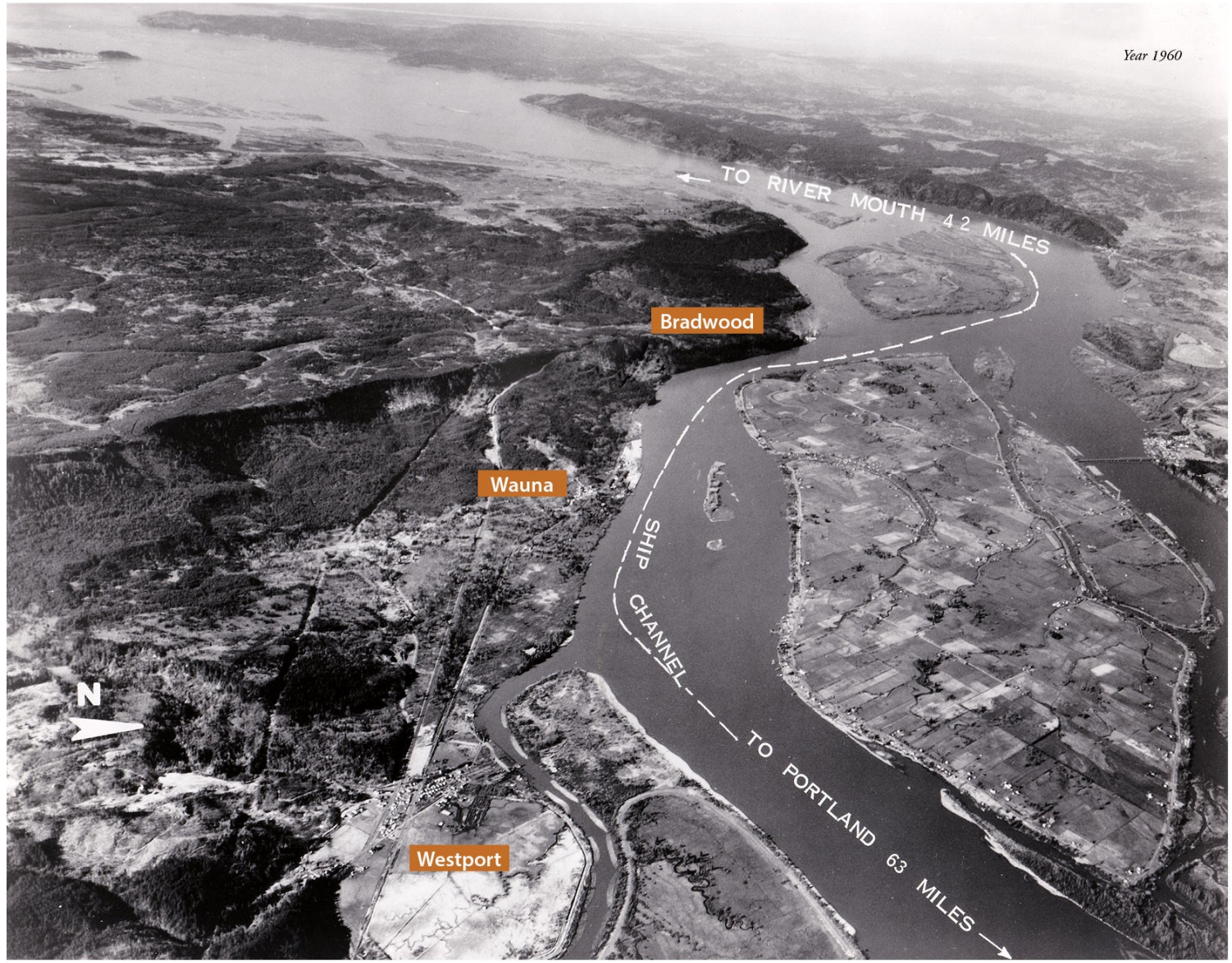
John West, of Portland, one of the best-known lumbermen of the Lower Columbia River district, died at Cathlamet, Wash., April 3, from hemorrhage of the stomach suddenly, while attending to some private business. Mr. West was born in Riccarton, Scotland, in 1855, educated at the University of Edinburg, and came to America when

JOHN WEST.

20 years of age, settling at Westport, Ore., whence he was identified with his uncle, John West, in the conduct of a sawmill. He afterwards carried on a lumber business with associates at Westport, disposing of his interests to the Blinn-Waldo Co. Mr. West had been a resident of Portland during the past five years, being employed by the Benson Logging & Lumber Co. He is survived by a wife and four children.

1880 purchased Birnie land claim

FRENCH BARK
MARCHEL D' CASTRIES
AT THE
COLUMBIA RIVER
ENTRANCE


Year 1960
TO RIVER MOUTH 42 MILES
Bradwood
Wauna
SHIP CHANNEL
TO PORTLAND 63 MILES
N
Westport

Ferryboats	Approximate Yrs. of Operation	Owner	Run (PI=Puget Island)
Cathlamet	1925-1932	Coates	Cathlamet-PI
Westport	1925-1932	Coates	PI-Westport
Everett A	1932-1939	Houchen/ Danielsen	Cathlamet-PI & PI-Wesport
Everyday	1934-1936	Houchen/ Danielsen	Cathlamet-PI
Everyday No. 2	ca. 1933	Houchen/ Danielsen	PI-Westport
Pioneer	ca. 1935-1940s	unclear	unclear
Tourist No. 1	1936-1949	Danielsen	PI-Westport
Almar	1949-1959	Danielsen	PI-Westport
Wahkiakum	1962-2015	County	PI-Westport
Oscar B	2015-current	County	PI-Westport

- *Oregonian*- July 14, 1964
- “there were eight different ferry boats before the *Whakiakum”*
- County takes over 1960 and state partners in 1969
- Currently only interstate ferry operating west of the Mississippi
- One of three crossing the Columbia the other two are intrastate near Grand Coulee Dam in Washington.

-Points in Time-

1925

Walter Coates started a ferry service with two wooden boats running from Cathlamet to Puget Island and from Puget Island to Westport.

1932

Coates sold his boats, and from 1932 to 1936 Arthur W. Houchen operated a boat and barge service on the route from Cathlamet to Puget Island and Puget Island to Westport.

1936

Almar Danielsen of Puget Island took over and installed the ferry *Tourist.*

1938

The bridge between Puget Island and Cathlamet is built and eliminated the need for the Puget Island to Cathlamet ferry. The ferry from Puget Island to Westport continued with the *Tourist.*

1949

Danielsen replaced the Tourist with an all-metal 65-foot ferry named after him, the *Almar.* Danielsen grounded the Tourist downriver from the ferry dock on Puget Island.

1959

Danielsen quit the ferry business and sold the *Almar* to the town of Anacortes, Washington.

1960 for a short time in 1960 Darrell Boylan of Richland Tug and Barge operated a 75 by 24-foot barge that serviced the route from Puget Island to Westport.

Late in the year the ferry service between Puget Island and Westport was taken over by Wahkiakum County, Washington.

1962

A new ferry named *Wahkiakum* was built in Hood River, Oregon at a cost of $45,000 and began operation. The *Wahkiakum* had a capacity of 14 automobiles and 36 passengers and made the crossing in about 10 minutes.

2015

In March the current ferry the *Oscar B* took over the ferry route.

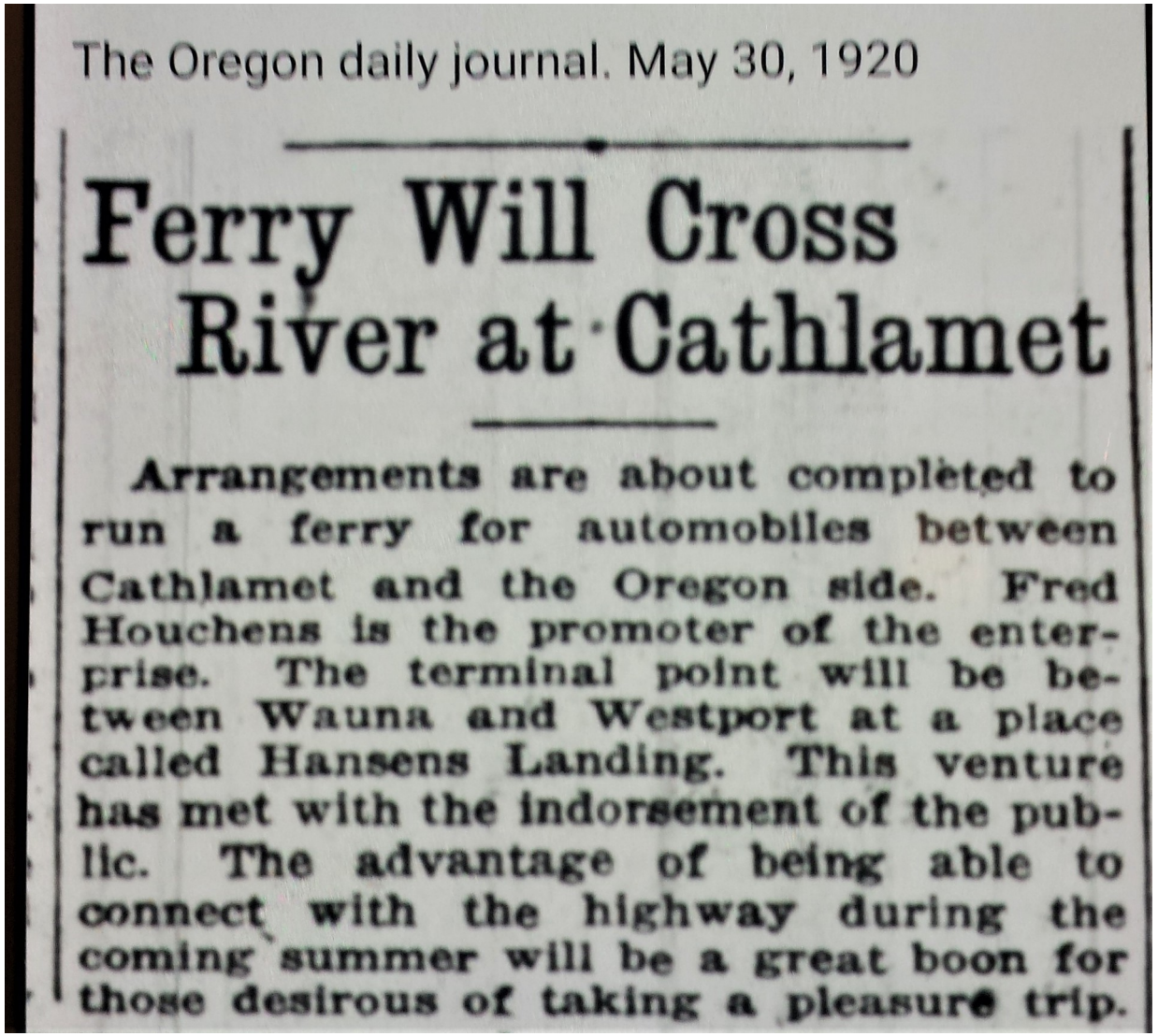
Coats-Westport/Cathlam
Dainelsen -Almer
Bergseng-Wahkiakum
Now the Oscar B.

No Bridges on Lower Columbia

Commencing in 1921:

“ Captain Elfving 15 car Tourist ferry Megler to Astoria.”

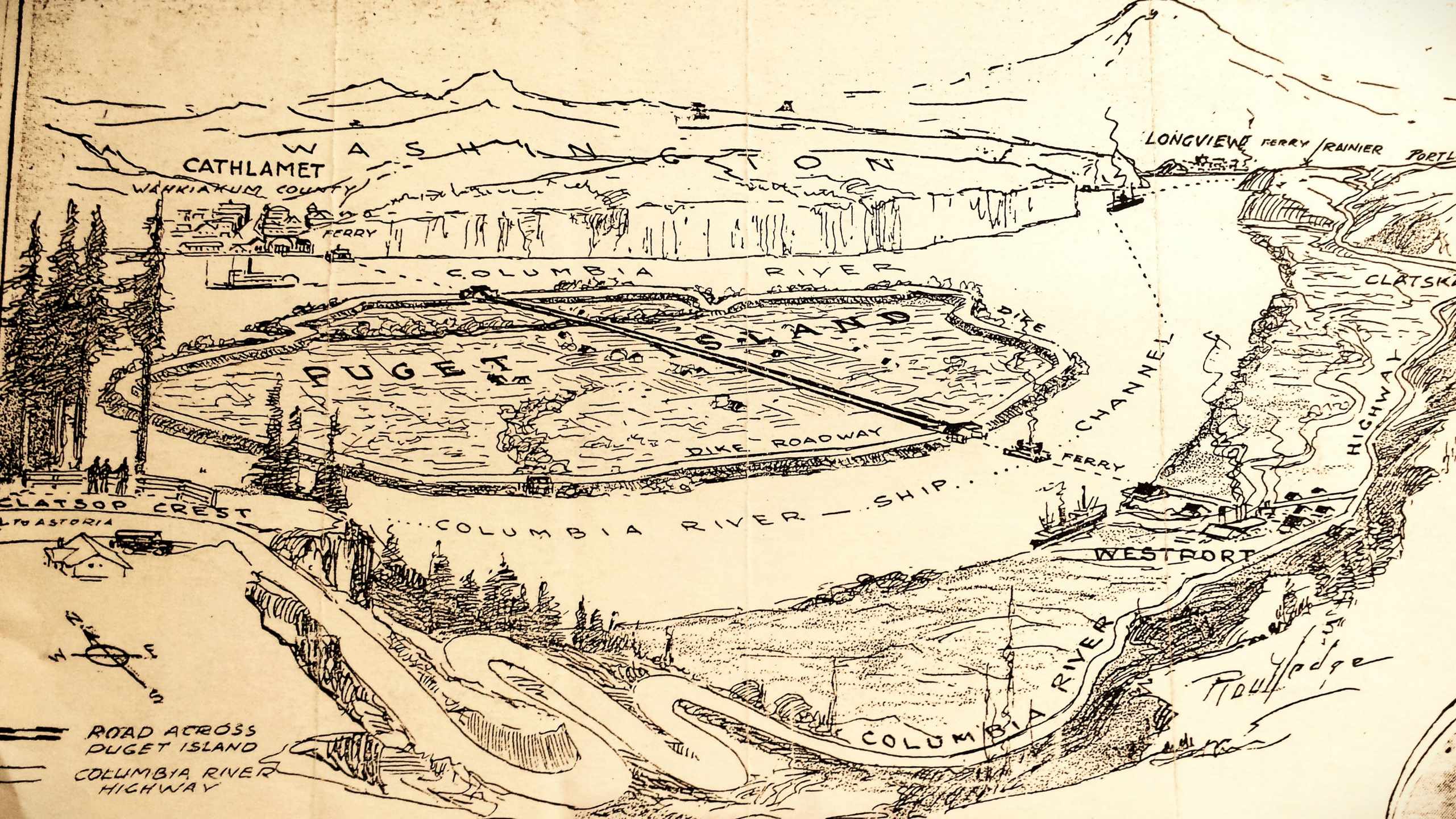
“ Long-Bell Lumber Co. ferry between Longview and Rainer.”



The Oregon daily journal. May 30, 1920

Ferry Will Cross River at Cathlamet

Arrangements are about completed to run a ferry for automobiles between Cathlamet and the Oregon side. Fred Houchens is the promoter of the enterprise. The terminal point will be between Wauna and Westport at a place called Hansens Landing. This venture has met with the indorsement of the public. The advantage of being able to connect with the highway during the coming summer will be a great boon for those desirous of taking a pleasure trip.


WASHINGTON
CATHLAMET
WAHKIAKUM COUNTY
FERRY
COLUMBIA RIVER
LONGVIEW
FERRY
RAINIER
PORTL
CLATSKA
PUGET ISLAND
DIKE
DIKE — ROADWAY
CHANNEL
FERRY
HIGHWAY
CLATSOP CREST
TO ASTORIA
COLUMBIA RIVER — SHIP
WESTPORT
COLUMBIA RIVER
ROAD ACROSS PUGET ISLAND
COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY

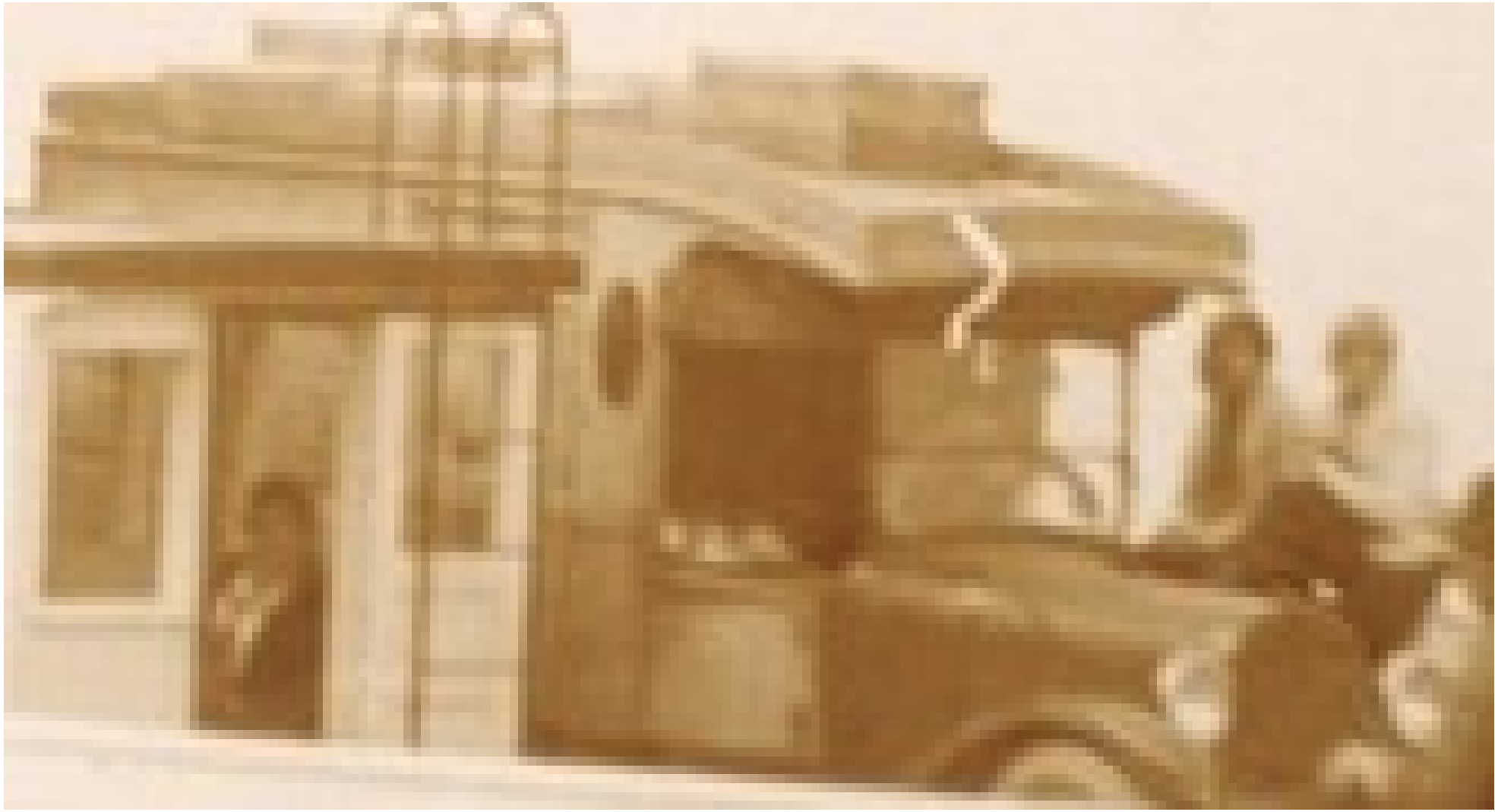
Columbia River from Bradley Park.
#565.
©
Crosby Brothers

“The Cathlamet Ferry Company was incorporated on December 15, 1924. Starting with a capital stock of $25,000, Westport was stated as the principal place of business. Listed as incorporators were W.G. (Walter George) Coates, E. N. (Walter’s son Ellis Nelson) Coates, and L.R. (Walter’s wife Lillie Rose) Coates. Prior to the time of this incorporation, Walter Coates already operated a ferry service between Puget Island and Cathlamet. Before that, he ran a ferry out of Kingston on Puget Sound in Washington. In 1925, Coates put two identical eight-car wooden ferries into operation, each with sixty-five horsepower inboard Fairbanks Morse Diesel engines. These twin ferries, the Cathlamet and the Westport, were built at the Mathews Boatyard in Portland.”

“By July of 1925, a three-and-a-half-mile gravel road was constructed transecting the twelve-mile-long Puget Island from north to south. Coates operated a Buick touring car to transport foot passengers and his ferry crew over the Puget Island Road between ferry terminals. The Buick was later replaced by a used maroon-colored Studebaker bus, purchased from a Portland hotel.”

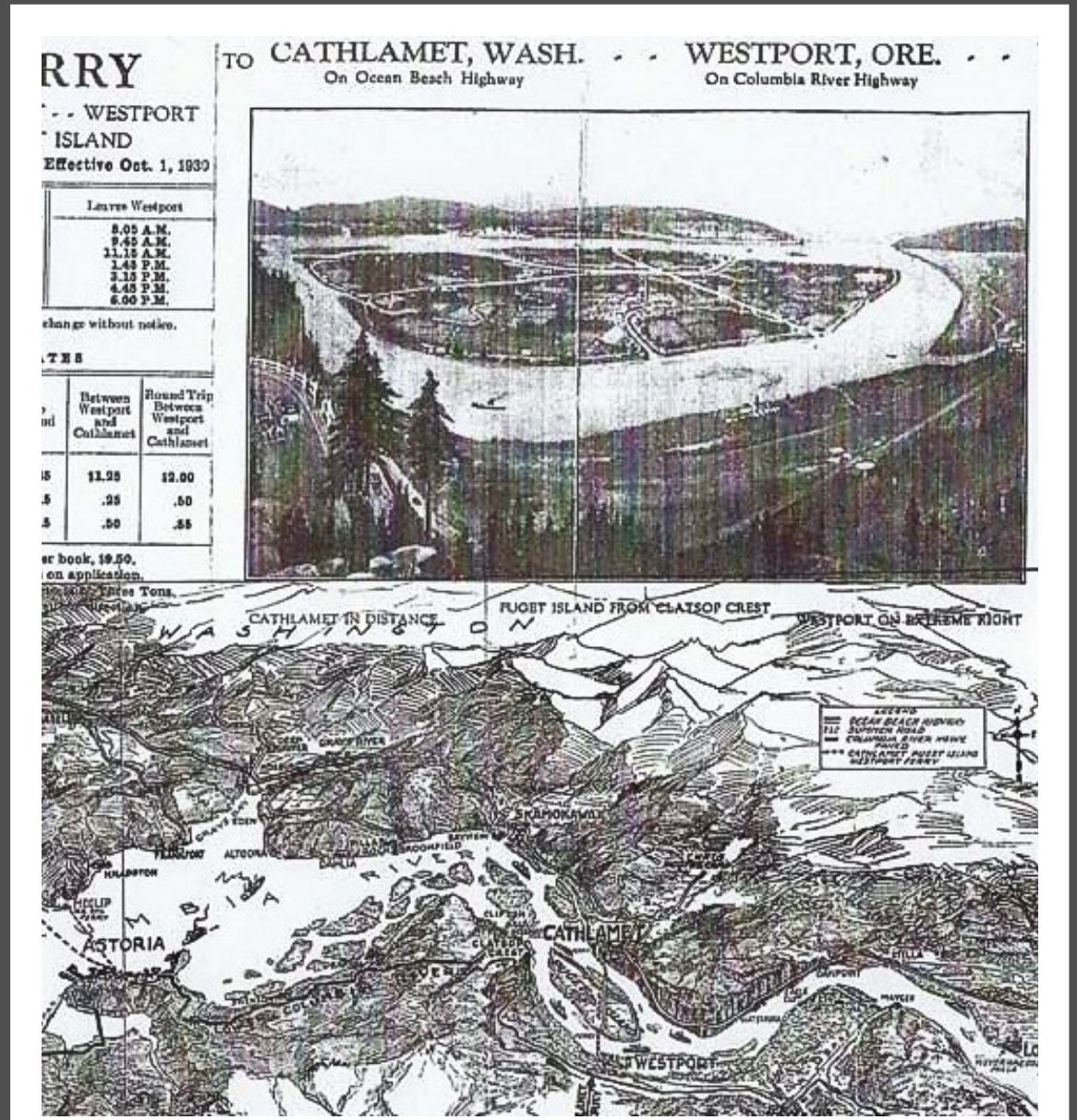
WESTPORT

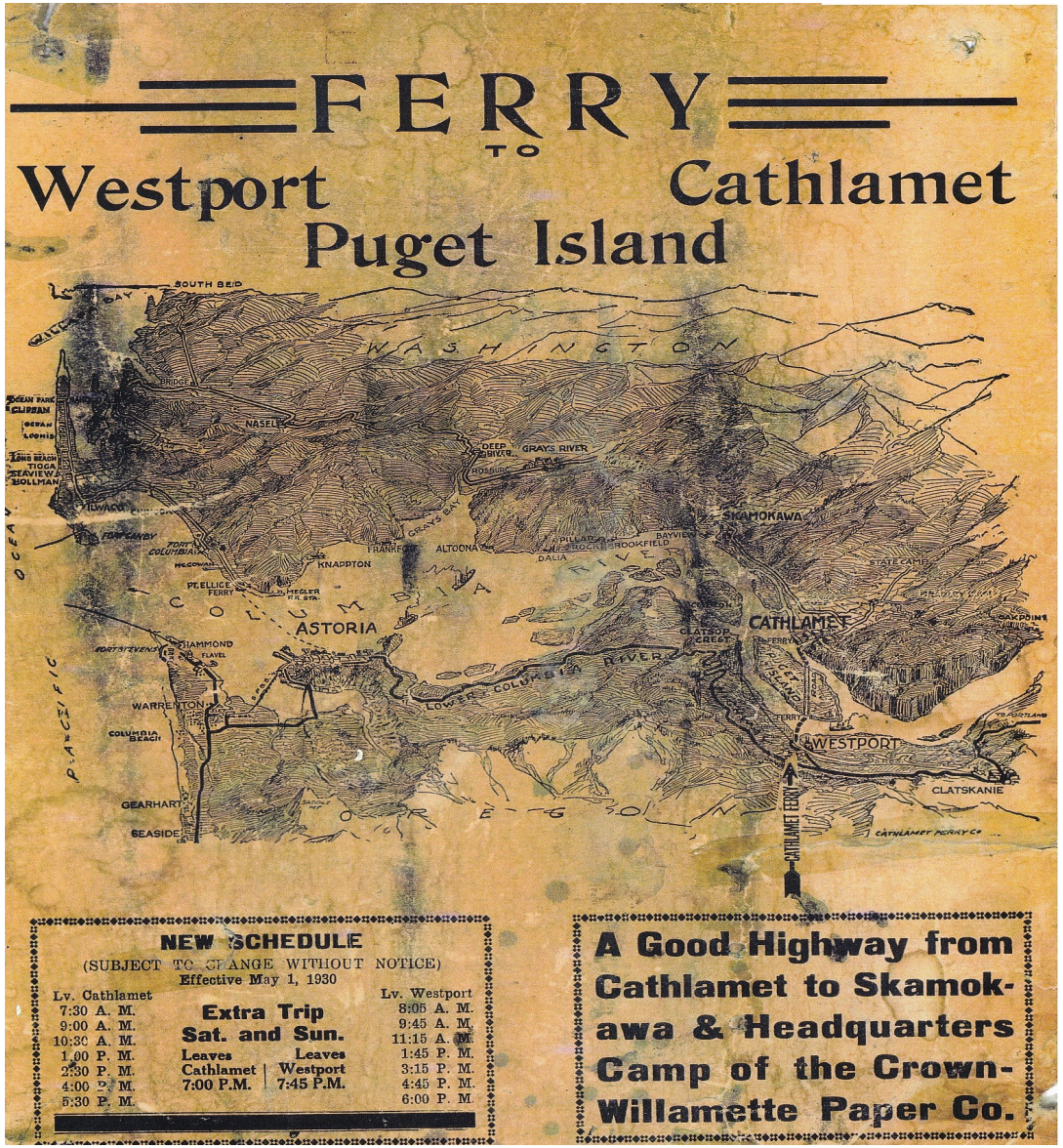
CATHLAMET



CATHLAMET
CATHLAMET
OF CATHLAMET

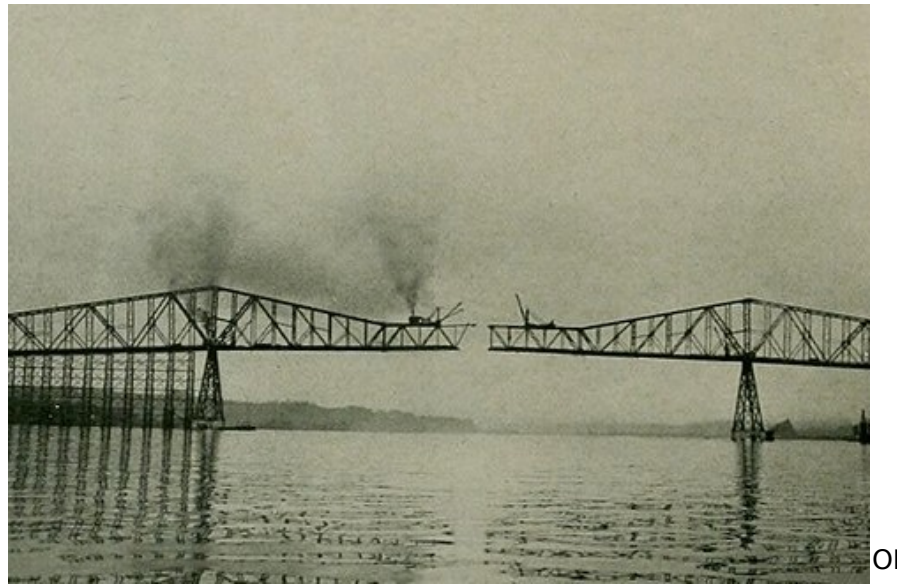
Walter
Ellis
Mel



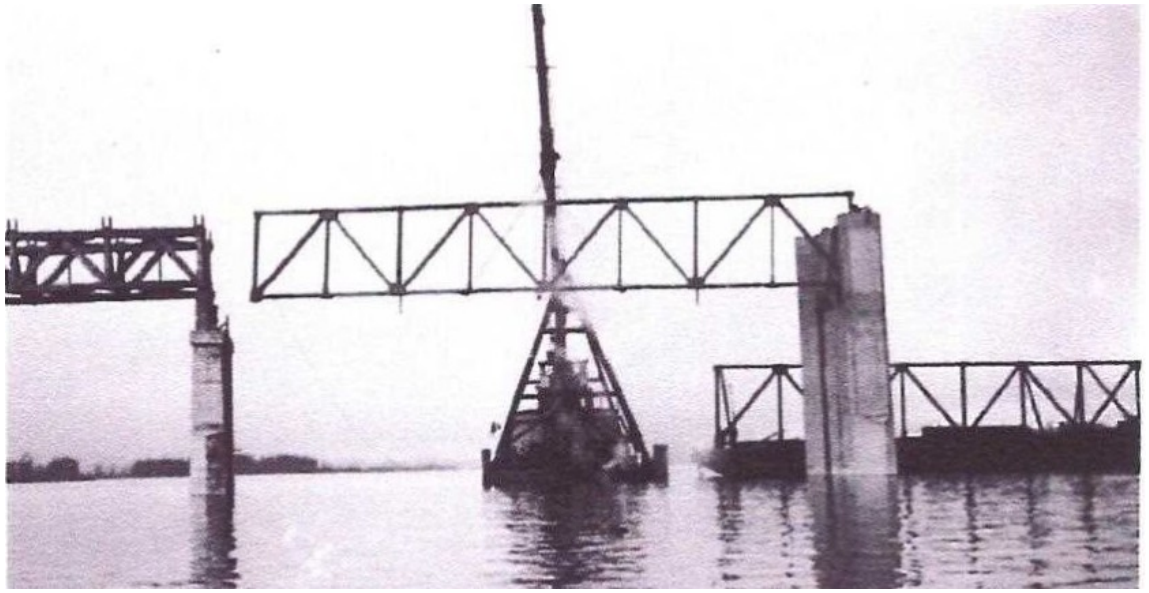


car + diver $.15 passengers to Island $1.25 Westport to Cathlamet / 1938 7 tripes per day M-F 8 tripes

OPENED
1966

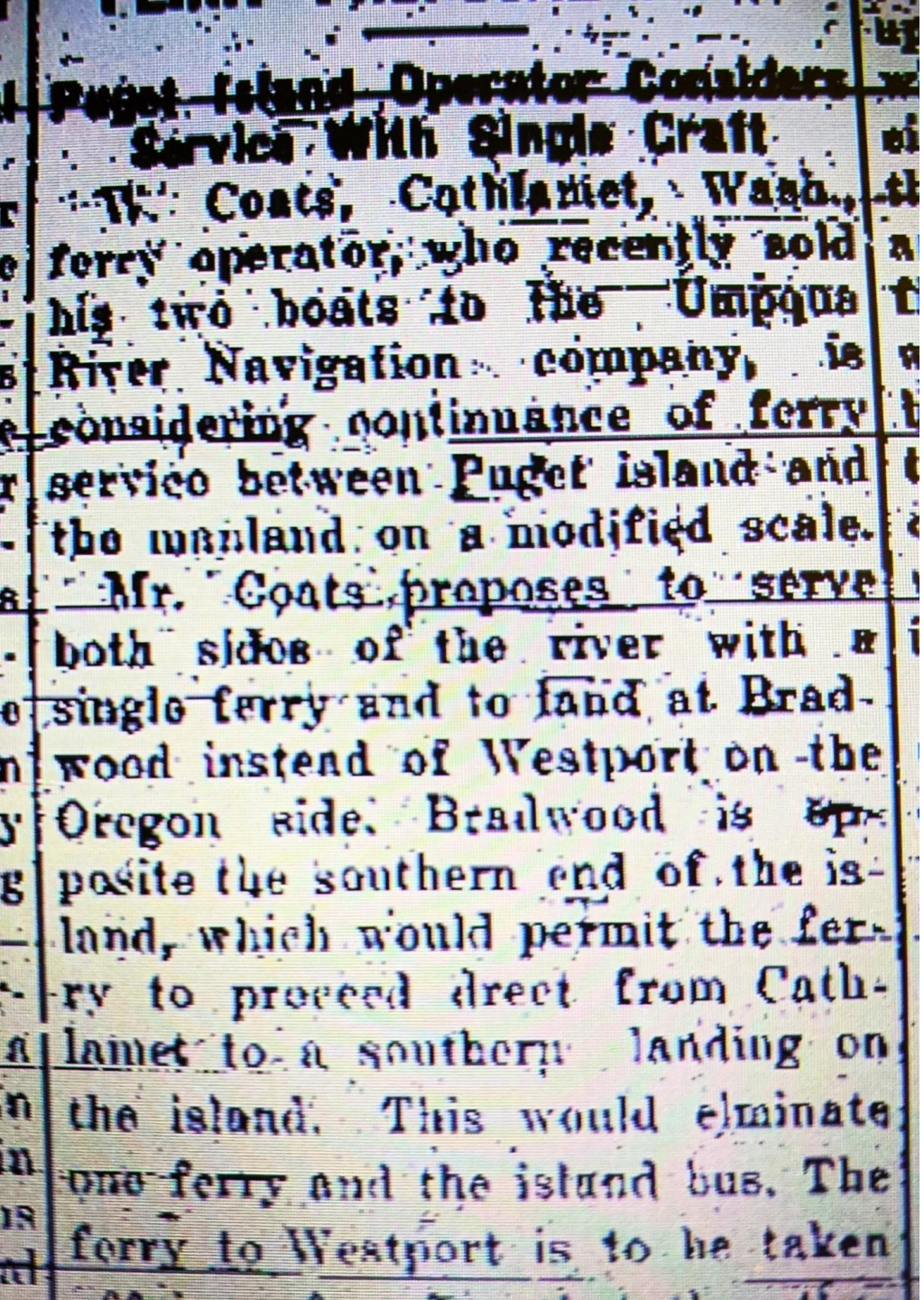


OPENED 1930



Julia Hansen
OPENED 1939

< Longview-Rainier Bridge- Robert Long owned 1930-1947- longest highest cantilevered bridge in America- engineered J. Strauss later Golden Gate



Puget Island Operator Considers Service With Single Craft

W. Coats, Cathlamet, Wash., ferry operator, who recently sold his two boats to the Umpqua River Navigation company, is considering continuance of ferry service between Puget island and the mainland on a modified scale.

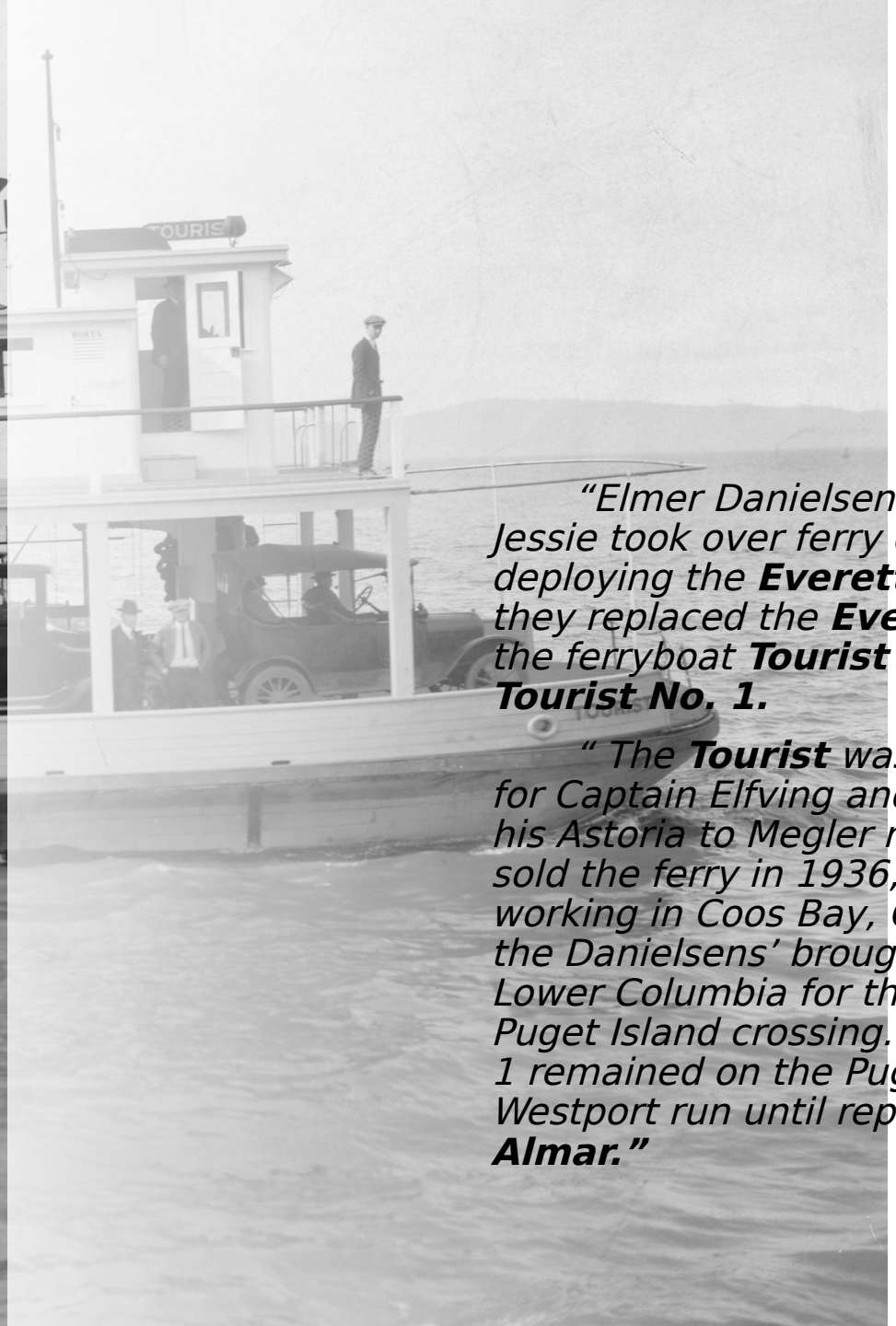
Mr. Coats proposes to serve both sides of the river with a single ferry and to land at Brad-wood instead of Westport on the Oregon side. Brailwood is opposite the southern end of the island, which would permit the ferry to proceed direct from Cathlamet to a southern landing on the island. This would eliminate one ferry and the island bus. The ferry to Westport is to be taken

- **1932** Arthur Houchen and Ray Lendten took over from Coats. Houchen the Cathlamet to Puget Island run and Lendten the Puget Island to Westport run They deployed the tugs ***Cora*** and ***Standard*** using barges

- Later deploying the ferry boats ***Everett A***, the ***Everyday*** and the ***Everyday No. 2***

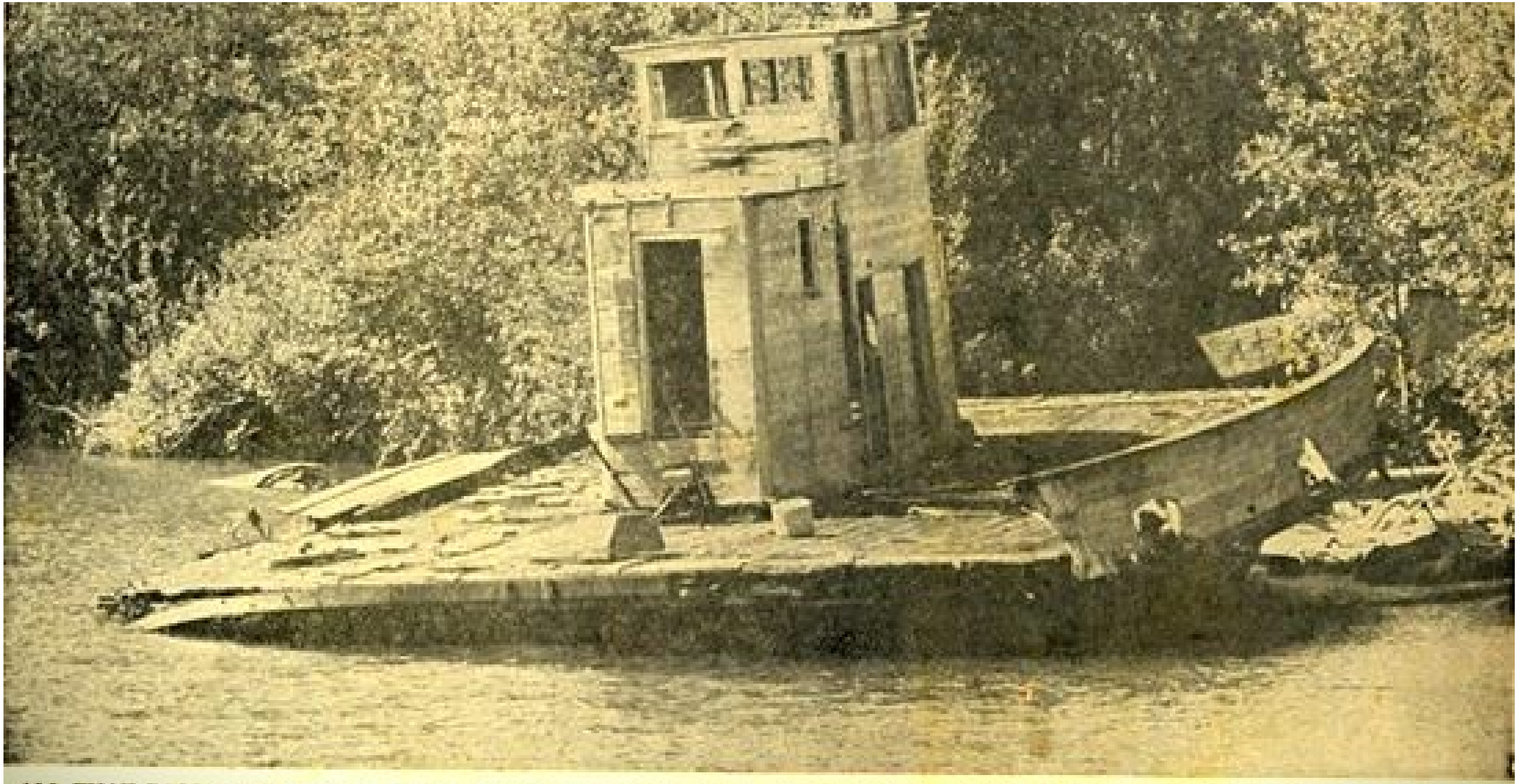
- **1936** Sold out to Elmer Danielsen

Everyday- Julia Butler Hansen Bridge

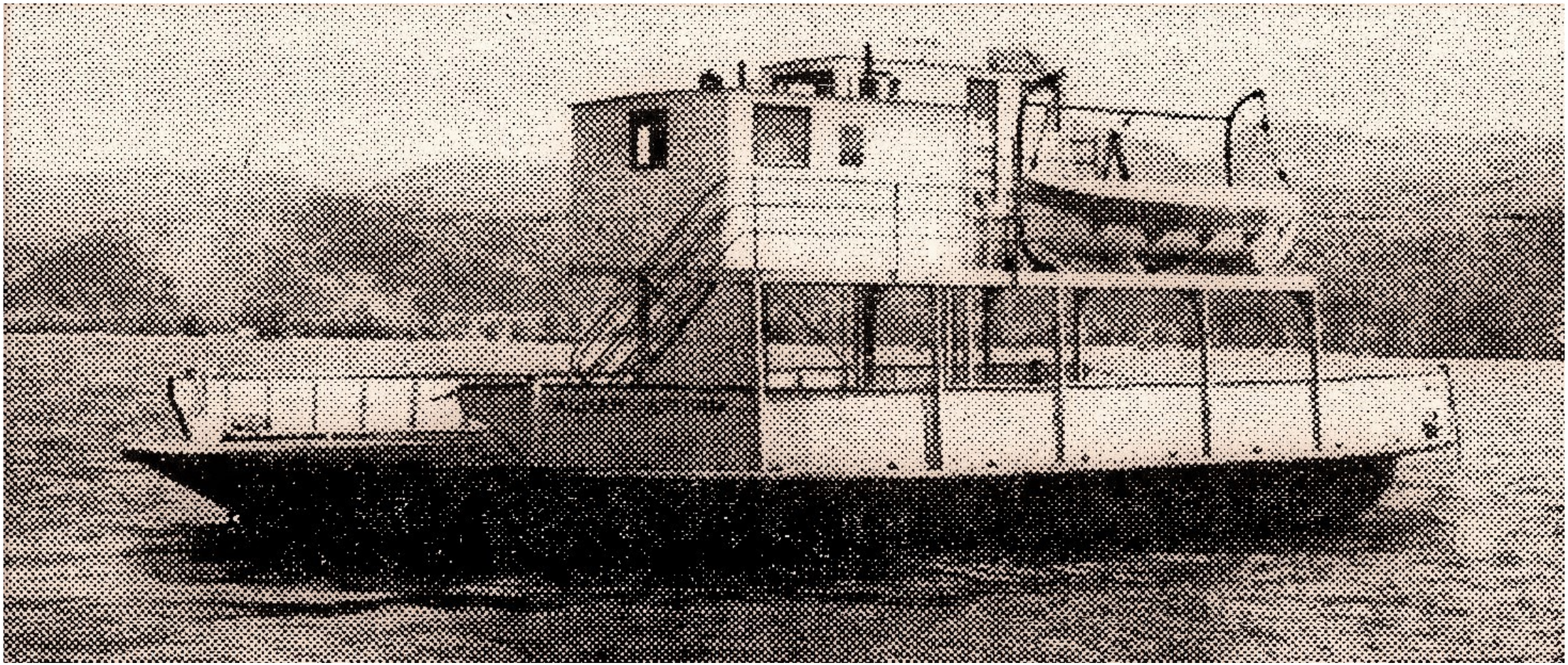


*“Elmer Danielsen and his wife Jessie took over ferry operations deploying the **Everett A**. in 1936 they replaced the **Everett A**. with the ferryboat **Tourist** renamed **Tourist No. 1.***

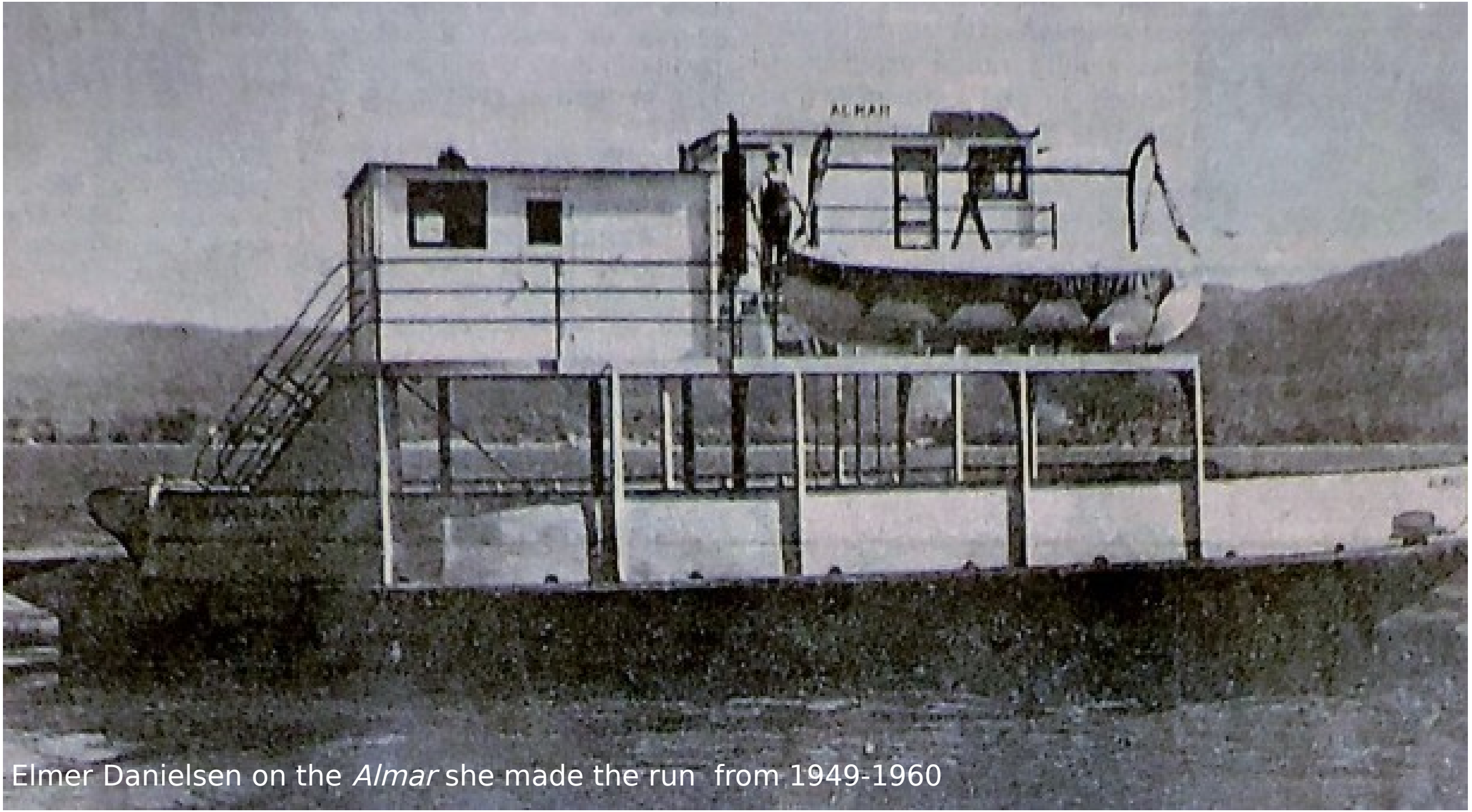
*“ The **Tourist** was built in Astoria for Captain Elfving and operated on his Astoria to Megler run. Elfving had sold the ferry in 1936, and it was working in Coos Bay, Oregon, when the Danielsens’ brought it back to the Lower Columbia for the Cathlamet to Puget Island crossing. The Tourist No. 1 remained on the Puget Island to Westport run until replaced by the **Almar.**”*



ALL THAT REMAINS of the old ferry, "Tourist No. 1" is this rotting hull near the Puget Island landing of the Westport ferry. The "Tourist" went aground in 1947 and has been rotting on the beach since. (Photos by Leonard Bacon)



Elmar Norse for Elmer (Danielsen) – built on Puget Is. in 1949 cost $43,700- 65’- carried 14 cars



Elmer Danielsen on the *Almar* she made the run from 1949-1960

Circa 1950

ALMAR

Shepard & Morse bought mill 1946

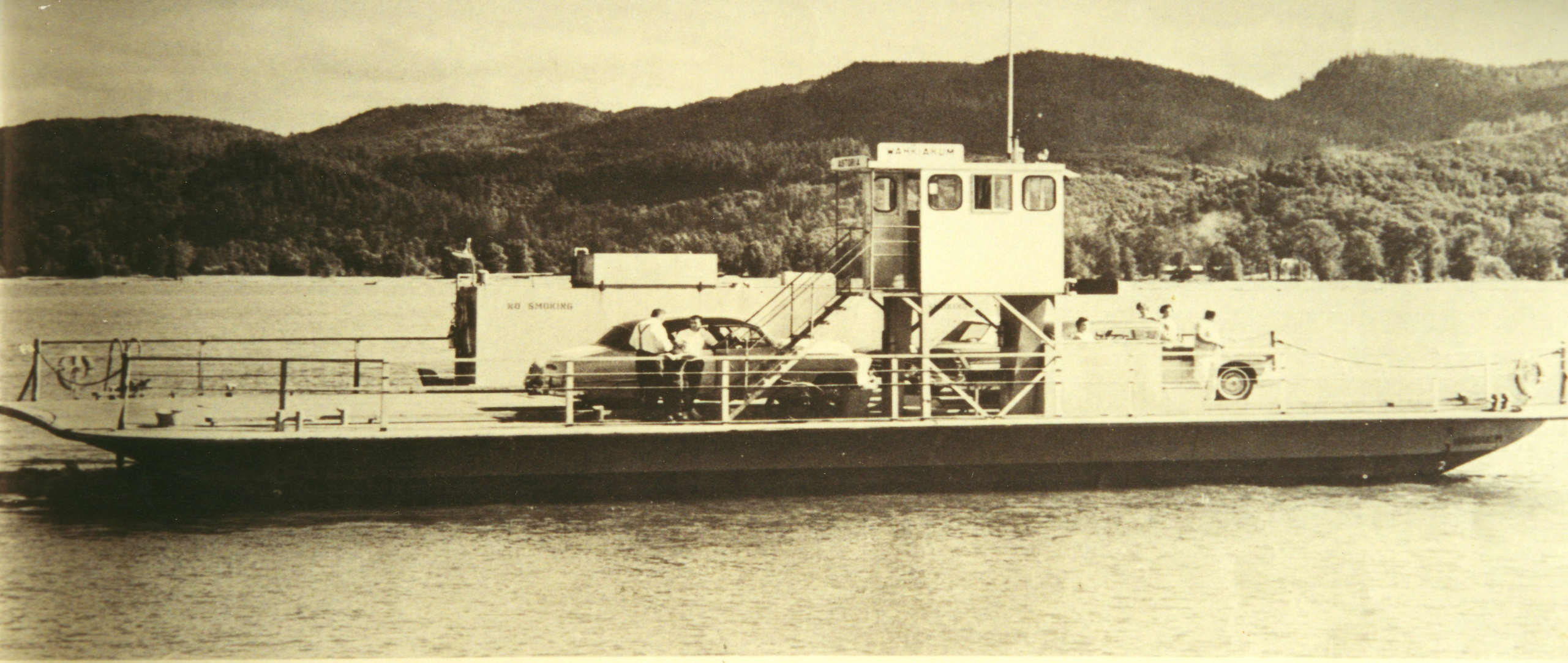
“In 1958, after twenty-two years in operation, the Danielsen’s’ sold the ferry. However, the buyer went broke and defaulted on the purchase. Elmer Danielsen immediately found himself back in the ferry business. Then Elmer and Jessie divorced in April of 1959, and she was awarded the ferry in the settlement while Elmer retained the ownership of the Puget Island Telephone Company.”

“ Patronage for the ferry service had declined after the closures of the two big sawmills. Jessie indicated at the time that the volume of business was not sufficient to support the employment of two deckhands. Jessie discontinued ferry service on November 17, 1959, and for the next four-and-a-half months, there was no service. She sold the Almar to George Bacon of Maryhill, Washington. The ferry was then taken to Puget Sound for service in Anacortes. The Almar was eventually taken to Alaska and converted into a fish-receiving boat.”

“With the shutdown, many thought that it might be better to move the then proposed lower Columbia interstate bridge (the current Astoria-Megler Bridge) upstream. Either of the less costly sites at Jim Crow Point (near Brookfield, Washington) or a Puget Island crossings

“At this point Wahkiakum County has taken over and commissioned the construction of a new ferry the *Wahkiakum*.”

“*During this period plans were discussed to have the interstate bridge built from Puget Island to Bradley Point, the point would accommodate clearance for passing ships. Also considered was a three-point ferry run Puget Island to Westport to Wauna”*

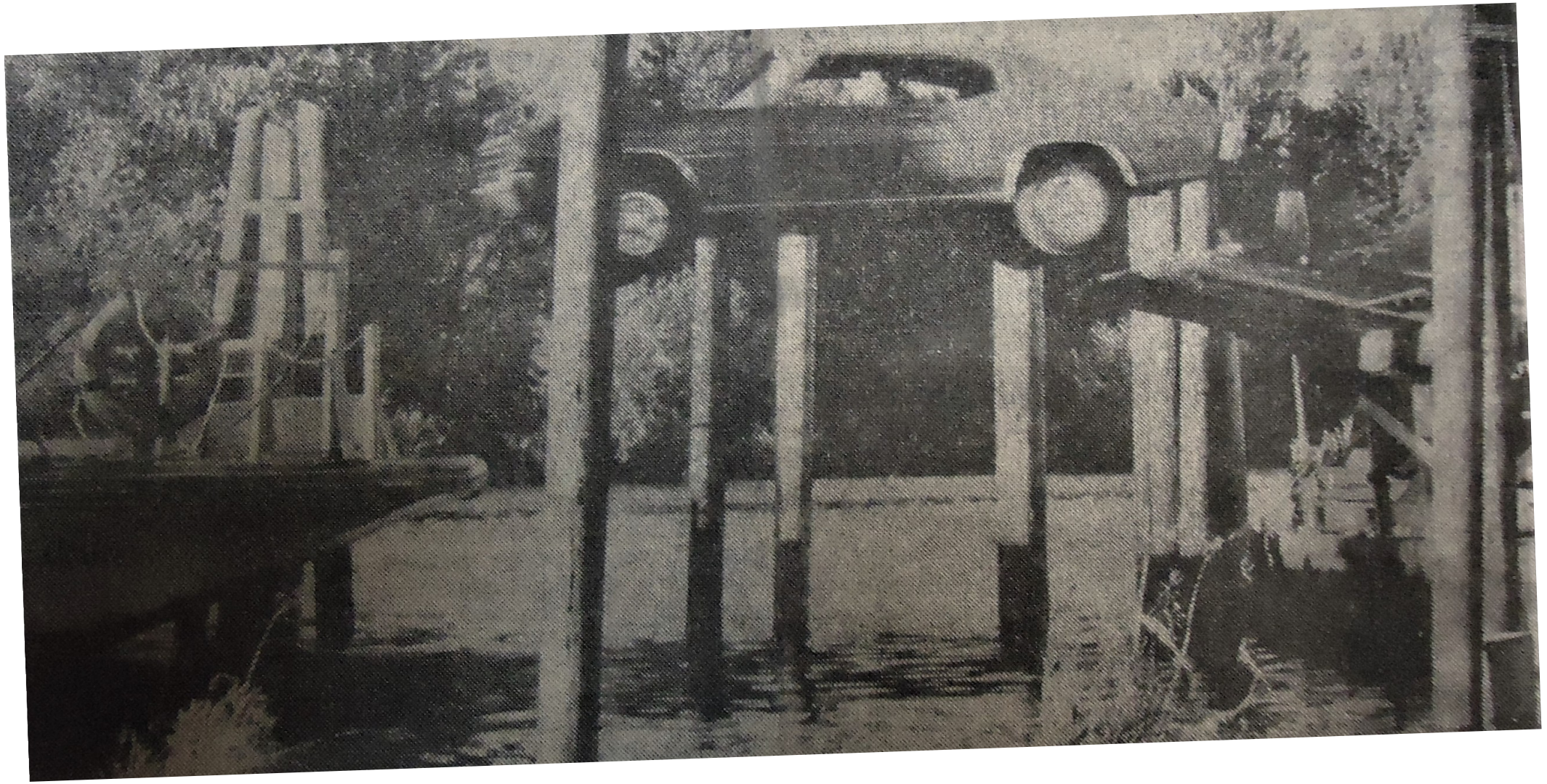


THE *WAHKIAKUM*, powered by twin 671 General Motors Diesel engines providing 300 HP, was built in 1968 by the Nichols Boat Works of Hood River, Oregon. The 29 by 75-foot craft (36-feet with deck overhang), which could carry up to a dozen cars, was equipped for the 1½-mile ferry route from the Oregon shore to Puget Island. She was commissioned by Wahkiakum County, Wash. at a cost of $46,000.00. She carried sophisticated navigational equipment.

Wahkiakum "tall timber" maiden voyage May 30, 1962 – 75'x29' 12 cars-36 passengers - twin 671 GM diesels 300hp

Wahkiakum
1960sDant&Russell

May 1972



The Delphi Bureau staring Lawrence Luckinbill
One Season ‘72-’73 (airborne 25’)

WAHKIAKUM FERRY RATES
Effective May 5, 1981

Single Trip Rates:

Foot Passenger	$ 0.25
Bicycle	0.50
Motorcycle	1.50
Passenger Cars and Pickups under 20 feet	
Vehicle and Driver	2.00
Each Additional Passenger	0.25
Auto Trailer under 10 feet	1.00
Each Additional 5 feet or Fraction Thereof	1.00
Tractor	2.00
Tractor Wagon under 10 feet	1.00
Each Additional 5 feet or Fraction Thereof	1.00
Trucks and Busses under 25 feet	4.00
Each Additional 5 feet or Fraction Thereof	1.00
Commuter Tickets (Good for Two Calendar Months)	40.00
Pedestrian Ticket Book (20)	4.00
Car Ticket Book (20)	30.00
Special Trips	55.00
Children 12 years and under	Free

Rates on Car Ticket Books and Commuter Tickets Subject to Change
NO REFUNDS WILL BE GIVEN

Wahkiakum County Ferry

REGULAR SCHEDULE

LEAVES PUGET ISLAND	LEAVES WESTPORT
7:15 A. M.	7:30 A. M
8:15 A.M.	8:30 A.M
9:15 A.M.	9:30 A.M
10:15 A.M.	10:30 A.M
11:15 A.M.	11:30 A.M
12:15 P.M.	12:30 P.M
1:15 P.M.	1:30 P.M
2:15 P.M.	2:30 P.M
3:15 P.M.	3:30 P.M
4:15 P.M.	4:30 P.M
5:15 P.M.	5:30 P.M
11:15 P.M.	12:15 A.M

"Ride the Last Ferry on the Lower Columbia River"

- 53 year 365 days a year 24 crossing a day = 464,200 tripes

May 1986
Danny Eaton
Longview Daily News
Florence Tagg Elementary School

It was a day of celebration when Gov. Atiyeh arrived on the school's playground in an Oregon National Guard helicopter to dedicate the new sign. "This is proof that government isn't that big," the governor told the crowd. "Government is made of people, and this shows that you can get to them – touch them – if you try."

"DO NOT FOLLOW WHERE THE PATH MAY LEAD. GO, INSTEAD, WHERE THERE IS NO PATH AND LEAVE A TRAIL."
A FLORENCE I. TAGG SCHOOL PROJECT IN COOPERATION WITH OTHERS. JUNE 1986

WELCOME
TO
OREGON

Wahkiakum 1962-2015- 53 Years in service
Captains: Oscar Bergseng, Gary Bersgeng, Lamar Blix and Dan Eaton, Aldine, Oscar’s wife long time deckhand

.

“The aging Wahkiakum had been in service for over fifty years by 2015 and was replaced in March of that year with a brand-new ferry, the Oscar B, named in honor of the longtime ferry skipper, Oscar Bergseng. It had the same “birthing” place as its predecessor, the Wahkiakum, at the Nichols Brother Boat Builders of Freeland, Washington. The vessel cost a staggering $5,700,000. Adding to the cost the ferry docks at Westport and on Puget Island had to be rebuilt to accommodate the new ferryboat, at $2,500,000 and $575,000 respectfully.

“Fares contribute marginally to cover operations, of which eighty percent is covered by the taxpayers of the State of Washington and twenty percent by the taxpayers of Wahkiakum County. The state’s annual operating contribution is roughly $1.2 million the County contributing $100.000 +”

Oscar B - March 2015

2022

Month	Under 22'	22.1' - 75'	Motor Cycles	Bicycles	Foot Passengers
January	4,388	70	24	0	16
February	3,611	60	47	5	25
March	4,205	57	59	7	34
April	4,080	84	55	7	28
May	3,928	85	91	53	19
June	4,436	101	124	51	52
July	5,237	113	217	77	65
August	5,389	123	256	75	64
September	4,675	110	231	107	39
October	4,363	89	146	20	30
November	2,853	69	25	0	26
December	0	0	0	0	0

TOTALS	47,165	961	1275	402	398

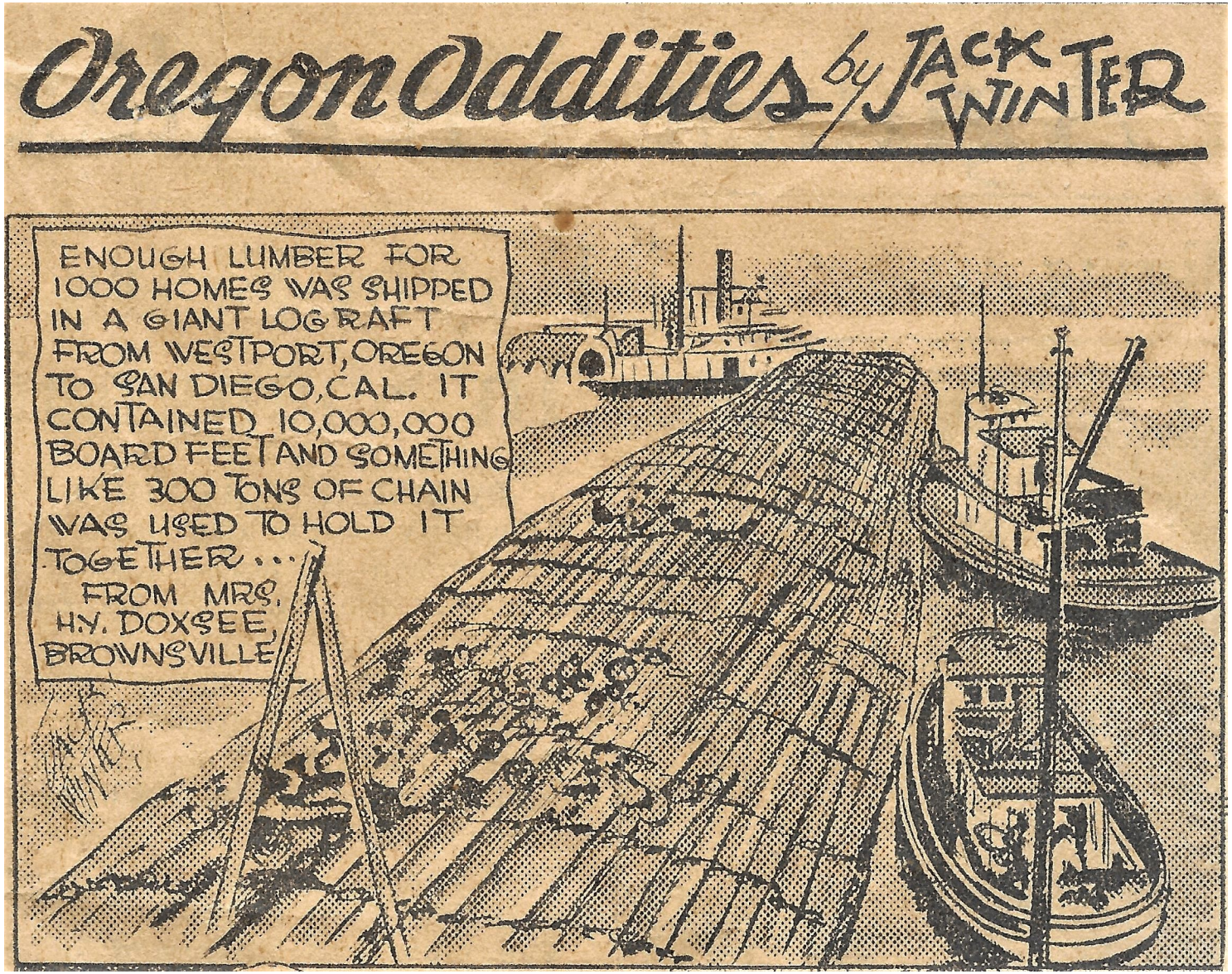
TOTAL of ALL Passengers on the ferry

81,234

The End

COMING
SOON

Oregon Oddities by Jack Winter


ENOUGH LUMBER FOR 1000 HOMES WAS SHIPPED IN A GIANT LOG RAFT FROM WESTPORT, OREGON TO SAN DIEGO, CAL. IT CONTAINED 10,000,000 BOARD FEET AND SOMETHING LIKE 300 TONS OF CHAIN WAS USED TO HOLD IT TOGETHER ... FROM MRS. H.Y. DOXSEE, BROWNSVILLE

1940 Queen Elizabeth 883’

1939 1,000’

Thanks For Coming
Drive Safe